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CONVERSATION PIECE

U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE SATELLITES AND WESTERN EUROPEAN REACTIONS TO RADIO FREE EUROPE.

I. Time and Place of the Conversation: 6 PM - [illegible] U.S. Embassy Residence, Vienna, 5 November 1956.

II. Dramatis Personae:

1. Mrs. B. - Naturalized American citizen of Hungarian birth, aged in upper thirties, [redacted] and is presently serving as a temporary volunteer with the International Rescue Committee in Austria.

2. Mr. B. - Husband of Mrs. B; U.S. labor representative with ICFTU and long time close observer of European affairs with special emphasis on Communism in the world labor movement; well and favorably known to [redacted] although in French official doghouse for past few years as the result of the French belief that Mr. B. has been creating difficulties with them among North African labor groups.

3. Miss C. - An American consular official from Munich concerned with refugee resettlement programs; currently reacting most strongly against the British and French intervention in the Suez.

4. Mrs. G. - Wife of a USIA official presently visiting in Europe having spent the past two weeks in Bern and Munich and presently visiting Vienna with Miss C.

5. The United States Ambassador to Austria, who was present only during the latter portion of the conversation.

6 and 7. Two "guest Americans".

III. Explanatory Note:

This conversation piece is prepared for the purpose of endeavoring to capture and clarify some of the numerous strong and conflicting cross-currents of opinion as observable in Austria with regard to U.S. governmental policy toward Hungary and the Satellites and the view in which the various American and British radios and information organizations, primarily RFE, are held. There are so many different points of view and so much obvious confusion in the minds of even the best informed and most responsible U.S. and foreign

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officials, as well as public opinion, as to render it impossible at this time to draw any clear conclusions or to make firm recommendations which might be helpful to U.S. information broadcasting media. In view of this confusion of thinking the device of employing a conversation piece has suggested itself as a means of informing the responsible governmental authorities in Washington, New York, and Munich.

IV. The Conversation:

The conversation was opened by a lengthy and detailed description of the conditions and attitudes among the Hungarian refugees in one of the larger refugee camps near Vienna, as related by Mrs. B., with some additional detail contributed by Mr. B. Both Mr. and Mrs. B. had been visiting one or more of the larger camps during the past 48 hours, in the company of a number of European labor leaders and in connection with Mrs. B's work for the IRC. Mrs. B spoke with strong emotion which reflected clearly her reaction to the pitiful stories poured out to her in Hungarian by numerous refugees including a large number of teen-age girls and boys. She said that it seemed clear to her that practically all Hungarians have reached a point in their hatred and revulsion against the Russians that they do not particularly care whether they live or die. When asked what they wanted, the first response from most of the boys was "we don't want any sympathy or verbal expressions of support for our cause - give us Molotov cocktails and we will go back to attack the Soviet tanks". One group of young girls who had been hastily evacuated from a girls' preparatory school together with their teachers just before the arrival of the Soviet tanks seemed mainly worried about the fact that their families did not know where they were and anxious to communicate their whereabouts to their parents by notifying them through RFE. They all stated that they and their parents regularly listened to and heard well the broadcasts of RFE and they regarded this as the surest way of getting word to the parents who are scattered about in different locations. (The girls were talked out of this request by several of the more mature Austrians and Americans to whom they made their appeal, when it was pointed out to the girls that such broadcasts by RFE might seal a death warrant for their parents or at the very least cause the Soviets and Hungarian communist security authorities to exert pressure upon the parents to recall the children to Hungary). Mr. and Mrs. B deplored the body of international and United Nations "law and usage" pursuant to which they understood that minor children could shortly be compelled to return to the country of their origin - a la the Greek pattern. It was suggested by one of the quiet Americans that in the present state of world popular opinion, it might well be possible to prevent or stall the application of these precedents, whatever they may be, in the present situation and at least until more favorable developments have occurred in Hungary. The next need expressed by the refugees was that of something to do. They all feel frustrated and feel the need to have some useful and productive work, no matter what. The girls students have stated that whereas they, as well as the boys would primarily like to return to their homes at the earliest possible date,

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they would welcome and appreciate the opportunity to continue their studies during the interim in schools in Switzerland, Austria and Germany - in that order of preference. They did not wish to go far away from home since they wanted to be in a position to take up contact with their relatives and friends as soon as possible. They also requested books and other materials for study and reading in the Hungarian language. They had no immediate physical wants and appeared to be well cared for as regards food and clothing, all of which was being provided by the Austrian and other labor and relief organizations in charge of the camps which were visited. Mrs. B concluded this portion of the discussion with an extremely strong condemnation of RFE, the VOA and even of BBC, declaring "I wish we had never started this business" - and "it was a wicked thing for us to do unless we had the intention of coming to the rescue of the Satellite peoples whom by our deeds and actions we have been inciting to rise against their Soviet and Communist masters". RFE was singled out with particular emphasis.

4. This last line of Mrs. B's was immediately picked up by Mrs. C. and to some extent by Miss C., both of whom stated that this was also the view of "practically everyone they had talked to in Germany." Mrs. C. adopted this as her own view and was extremely strong and categorical in her condemnation of RFE, stating that she had been told that RFE had incited and encouraged the Hungarian people to revolt. Even Mr. B. at first went along with this thesis, but quickly modified his line in response to a question and a brief statement on the part of one of the quiet Americans. The question was "what basis do you or any of the people to whom you have talked have for their statements that RFE and the official western radio voices have incited or encouraged the Hungarian people to rise; and are you by any chance aware of the fact that it has been the consistent policy of these "voices" to refrain from incitement to revolt; and that on the contrary these voices and particularly RFE have been constantly cautioning and advising the Satellite peoples not to take action of the sort which would bring down upon them harsh measures of reprisal. The statement which accompanied this question was to the effect that it was extremely important to get the record clear as to what had caused and what started the Hungarian revolt, and once clarified to keep it clear; to the best of our knowledge the revolt was touched off by an internal power struggle within the Hungarian Communist Party, which reached its peak during the visit of Gero in Belgrad at which time the Nationalist Communist faction within the regime moved to seize control of the information and propaganda media and other levers of power within the communist structure. Mr. B, immediately chimed in supporting and confirming this statement, and declaring in most categoric terms that it was indeed the Communists who had started the fight and that they had given the whole affair the momentum which subsequently spread beyond their ranks and ultimately reached uncontrollable proportions. None of the others dissented from this although Mrs. C. and Miss C. both professed that it was the first time they had been aware of this sequence of developments and they further stated that none of the other people who had talked with them in Germany had seemed to realize this. Miss C. was, however, far more preoccupied with the

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disastrous impact the British-French intervention in the Suez upon Hungarian events, and she expressed the view that but for the Suez performance, the Russians might well have been out of Hungary before the beginning of the real blood bath (circa November 4). The distraction and confusion of world opinion had afforded to the Russians a desperately needed shield as well as a basis for aggressive exploitation, and had served the Russians well in their purpose of frustrating and nullifying United Nations actions against them.

3. Mr. B then came in with his own more balanced rationalization of the problem which bore evidence of hard-headed thinking and a serious attempt at critical analysis. He began by acknowledging, amid tears, that the western radio had not been inaccurate in the lines which they had been taking - but he pointed out that the very existence of their peregrinate activities and the Hungarian awareness of them (propaganda, too, has provided to the Hungarian people the most tangible evidence of the following factors:

a) That it is and has been the policy of the U.S. and Great Britain and primarily the U.S. to show the Hungarian people that they were not forgotten by the West and that their plight was very much alive in the minds of two foremost western powers;

b) That it has been the official policy of the United States repeatedly attested by U.S. governmental spokesmen of the highest levels, to look toward and continue to call for the ultimate liberation of the Hungarian people from the yoke of Communism;

c) The existence of a high standard of living and other bountious riches of western [illegible] as contrasted with the physical deprivations, and constant wasting fear and starvation of the Hungarians under communism.

6. Mr. B said he did not doubt that for a time the three factors had done much to condition the minds of the Hungarian people [illegible] support their spirit of resistance against the communist rule and [illegible] to render them far more susceptible than they would otherwise have been to call to rise and strike for freedom when it [illegible] was ripe and when they thought they would see a fair possibility of shaking off the shackles of communism and Soviet domination. As regards the sharp hostility being evinced by the majority of Hungarian refugees toward the United States (and the United Nations) Mr. B. said RFE had become a focal point for the frustration and disillusionment of the Hungarian freedom fighters and that their resentment against the US and the West for failing to come to their aid in the events of their agony had crystallyted around this most tangible expression of western and especially the American intention to provide support to our rebellious people if and when they should rise. The refugees were all critical of us but to a somewhat lesser extent the BBC were also very strong, but the VOA more than somewhat less violent than those levelled against RFE. Indeed, he [illegible] that RFE was "to be criticized only for having done [illegible] too much." Following through RFE, the

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Hungarian people have been shown and constantly reminded of all the blessings and benefits of freedom and democracy, and primarily through RFE the laboring class, the farmers, and others had been taught to understand and to know that these blessings and benefits might be theirs if they were but free. The other members of the group appeared, in varying degrees, to accept Mr. B's thesis and to indicate that they considered it at the moment to be both sensible and persuasive. Mrs. B., however, continued to show a very deep rooted bitterness against the voices of the West "which had appeared to promise but had failed to deliver."

7. Neither Mr. B nor any other members of the group felt themselves capable of offering any very sensible recommendations for a change of posture or line on the part of western information media although Mrs. B continued to express the conviction that RFE was in effect "a dirty word" in Hungary today intimating that the less heard from or about in Hungary at the moment, the better as far as the Hungarians are concerned. Mr. B said that he was torn between his acceptance of Mrs. B's analysis of Hungarian popular sentiment toward RFE on the one hand, and the clear evidence of the great impact and influence of RFE within Hungary on the other. He thought it was more a question of revising the approach in some way and he seemed troubled at the prospect of stilling this voice entirely. He and others thought that at the very least RFE and the VOA should be scrupulously careful to avoid any suggestion of encouragement to any form of action on the part of the Hungarian people and Mr. B. and others also recommended against the employment of any spectacular or particularly provocative means of communication such as balloons with messages directed at the Hungarian people. Both Mr. and Mrs. B. applauded Russian language broadcasts (of which they had heard two days earlier) for the purpose of bringing home to the Soviet troops the horrors and indecencies of their own position and actions.

8. At the conclusion of the discussion Mr. B. stated that he was absolutely convinced that there is serious trouble within the Soviet Union and that the Soviet regime, to say nothing of all the satellite regimes, are very badly shaken by the Hungarian developments. He felt that this was the time for a strong and positive western policy, not even excluding outright threats of the use of force if the Soviet troops are not immediately withdrawn from Hungary. He said that what he had in mind was a "policy reconnaissance in force" i.e., probings which should be both deep and strong and which should be designed to search out and exploit the weaknesses which he feels confident to exist within the Soviet structure itself. The conversation terminated with a strong expression of this view on the part of Mr. B. to the American Ambassador who thanked him for expressing his opinion but did not otherwise comment on the course of action proposed by Mr. B.

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